

# Communication Theory

## COMM 2315 | Fall 2012

Tues./Thurs., 9:30-10:50 a.m.

Fine Arts Room 258

**Instructor: Dr. Erika Pribanic-Smith**

**Office:** 2114 Fine Arts Building

**Hours:** Tues./Thurs., 11 a.m. to noon & by appt.

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Note: Because of other department and university duties, office hours occasionally will be cancelled. Cancellations will be posted on the office door and, when possible, announced in class and/or via email.

**Required Text and Class Materials**

Wood, J. (2004). *Communication theories in action: An introduction* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning

Scantron Form NO. 882-E (6) and a number 2 pencil for quizzes

**Course Description**

This course is designed for students who are new to the field of communication theory. Throughout the course, I aim to show you that communication theories, as well as the process of theorizing, are interesting and relevant to everyday life. The course is organized to provide you with foundations for understanding theorizing and opportunities to explore and apply those foundations in relation to particular theories. You will be encouraged to think critically and integratively about theories while you explore the connections between theories and reflect on how claims of one theory relate to those of other theories.

**Course Objectives.**

Although everyone is a theorist, not everyone is equally skilled at theorizing. Like any other activity, theorizing can be done well or poorly. Effective theorizing is based on knowing what theories are and how to evaluate their validity and value. In this course, you will learn how to test and assess theories. In turn, this will allow you to theorize more effectively about communication in your life. Thus, you will enlarge your ability to understand and control your interactions with others. In sum, this course aims to help you:

- Discover the power of theory to enhance your understanding of communication and your effectiveness as communicators,
- Develop your ability to think theoretically and critically,
- Enlarge your appreciation of multiple and complex ways in which communication is part of your everyday lives, and
- Develop an awareness and appreciation for diversity in social life.

**Requirements and Grading**

Your performance in the course will be evaluated as follows:

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Grading</b>
Class Participation	25%
Individual Quizzes	25%
Group Quizzes	25%
Team Presentation	25%

**Scale:**

A = 90-100

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

**All grades will be posted to Blackboard** (<http://elearn.uta.edu>). Please log in regularly to check grades and announcements. No grade information will be emailed. Students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester on Blackboard and seek guidance if their grade drops below satisfactory levels.

**Class Participation:** This will be a highly interactive course, with class time on most days divided among lecture, discussion and group activities. Discussion and group work is intended to help students process and absorb the lecture/reading material. Participation will be evaluated based on asking insightful questions and contributing informed, thoughtful comments.

**Quizzes:** Students will take five quizzes during the semester over lecture and reading material. Each quiz will contain 20 multiple choice and true/false questions. Students first will complete the quiz individually. Students then will complete the same quiz in teams. At the start of the semester, students will choose a team of 4-5 students to work with for the entire semester.

Students will have 30 minutes to complete the quiz individually. Those who arrive late will be allowed to take the quiz, but they will have only whatever time remains of that 30 minutes. For instance, if the student arrives 15 minutes into the individual quiz, he/she will have only 15 minutes to take the quiz. Individual quizzes will NOT be accepted after the group quiz has started.

Immediately after the individual quiz is collected, the team will have 45 minutes to take the same quiz. PLEASE BRING A SCANTRON FORM NO. 882-E AND A NO. 2 PENCIL FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL QUIZ. In addition, the group is responsible for providing one Scantron form for the group quiz.

A student who misses a quiz due to extreme illness, severe injury, or death in the family must present official documentation excusing the absence AT THE NEXT CLASS SESSION he/she attends and make up the quiz within 24 hours of returning to class. The student's individual grade on that quiz will count twice (once in lieu of the group quiz). Students will not be permitted to make up quizzes without documentation of one of those three reasons.

**Team Presentations:** Students will be responsible for one team presentation during the semester, discussing how a Hollywood film illustrates concepts covered in class and in the textbook. Teams will consist of 4-5 members.

The teams will be given a list of films that exemplify their respective chapters, and each team will select one film from the list. It would be wise to select a film to which one of the team members has easy access, if possible. Otherwise, films may be obtained from a local library or video store. If students choose to watch the film online, be aware that students must be able to present relevant clips in class.

Students should become intimately familiar with the chapter BEFORE watching the film. Carefully reading the chapter in the text would be the best way to accomplish this.

In the presentations, students must include all of the following:

1. INTRO: A **BRIEF** description of the plot and characters. (Do not delve into great detail; tell just enough for your peers to understand the clips.)
2. Summary of key concepts from **ONE** theory from your assigned chapter that is most relevant.
3. Relevant scenes from the movie. These should be on DVD or online and take no more than half of the presentation time (i.e., no more than 10 minutes for a 20-minute presentation). **MAKE SURE YOU CAN GET TO THE RELEVANT SCENES QUICKLY.** Don't leave "dead air;" any time spent hunting for the scenes counts as part of your movie and overall presentation times.
4. Explanation of how the theoretical communication concepts are illustrated in the scenes.
5. CONCLUSION: Summary of how communication theory helps better understand why people communicated the way they did in the clip(s) viewed **AND** how the assigned theory helps derive a deeper understanding of communication in everyday life by applying the relevant concepts to real-life situations and communication examples.

All presentations should be **no less than 17 minutes but no longer than 20 minutes in length**. Teams that go under 17 minutes or over 20 minutes will be penalized 10 percent.

Students not scheduled to present still are required to attend class and will earn participation points for being courteous audience members.

By noon on the day of the presentation, each member of the team will submit to Blackboard a memo indicating the extent to which each individual contributed to the project. This is part of the presentation grade. Students who admittedly fail to carry equal weight with other teammates will be penalized accordingly. The best solution is for all students to participate equally in the assignment.

ALL GROUP MEMBERS MUST BE PRESENT FOR THE PRESENTATION. If a student is going to miss the presentation day due to extreme illness, severe injury, or death in the family, the student should contact his/her teammates AND the instructor BEFORE CLASS and present official documentation excusing the absence AT THE NEXT CLASS SESSION he/she attends.

The rest of the team will be expected to present without the missing member. If the absent student follows the above procedure, that student will be given a make-up writing assignment. If not, the student will receive a zero.

### **Behavior expectations**

Students are learning to be communication professionals and are expected to model the following professional behaviors in class:

- Arrive to class on time and ready to participate.
- Turn cell phones to silent.
- Respect others; don't speak when someone else is speaking.
- Listen closely and disagree calmly with others' opinions.
- Do not text message, check personal e-mail, instant message, surf the Web or study for other classes during class time. **Students WILL be asked to leave the class if they are inattentive/disruptive**. Students who are asked to leave will be counted absent.

### **Attendance Expectations**

Students are to treat the class like a job; they are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. Work completed in class weighs heavily on the student's grade; therefore, failure to come to class will affect students' grades adversely. Absences from lecture are neither excused nor unexcused; students receive two free absences to use at their own discretion over the course of the term. Additional absences, for any reason, will result in the student receiving zeros for class work on days she/he was absent. **FREE ABSENCES CANNOT BE USED FOR QUIZZES OR YOUR TEAM'S PRESENTATION.**

***Tardiness will not be tolerated.*** Students who are not seated and ready to begin class by 9:35 will be counted absent.

## **Department, College, and University Policies**

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/ses/fao>).

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Academic Integrity:** All students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

*I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

Instructors may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

**Student Support Services:** UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at [www.uta.edu/resources](http://www.uta.edu/resources).

**Electronic Communication:** UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as lecture, seminar, or laboratory shall be directed to complete a Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

**Final Review Week:** A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

### Tentative Course Schedule & Due Dates

*As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule in any way that serves the educational needs of the students enrolled in this course. –Erika J. Pribanic-Smith*

Week	Dates	Topics/Class Readings/Due Dates
1	Aug. 23	Course Introduction/Team Selection
2	Aug. 28	Defining Communication (Chapter 1)
	Aug. 30	Understanding, Building and Testing Theories (Chapters 2-3)
3	Sept. 4	An Early Communication Theory (Chapter 4)
	Sept. 6	Chapter 4 Presentations
4	Sept. 10	<i>Census Date</i>
	Sept. 11	Quiz 1 (Chapters 1-4)
	Sept. 13	Theories About Symbolic Activity (Chapter 5)
5	Sept. 18	Chapter 5 Presentations
	Sept. 20	Theories About Performance (Chapter 6)
6	Sept. 25	Chapter 6 Presentations
	Sept. 27	Quiz 2 (Chapters 5-6)
7	Oct.2	Theories About How People Construct Meaning (Chapter 7)
	Oct.4	Chapter 7 Presentations
8	Oct.9	Theories About Interpersonal Dynamics (Chapter 8)
	Oct.11	<b>NO CLASS</b> (Professor at conference)
9	Oct.16	Chapter 8 Presentations
	Oct.18	Quiz 3 (Chapters 7-8)
10	Oct.23	Theories About Communication & the Evolution of Relationships (Ch. 9)
	Oct.25	Chapter 9 Presentations
11	Oct.30	Theories About Communication Communities (Chapter 10)
	Oct. 31	<i>Last Day to Drop</i>
	Nov.1	<b>COMMUNICATION DAY</b>
12	Nov.6	Chapter 10 Presentations
	Nov.8	Quiz 4 (Chapters 9-10)
13	Nov.13	Theories of Mass Communication (Chapter 11)
	Nov.15	Chapter 11 Presentations
14	Nov.20	Critical Communication Theories (Chapter 12)
	Nov.22	<b>THANKSGIVING</b>
15	Nov.27	Chapter 12 Presentations
	Nov.29	Postmodern Theorizing (Chapter 13)

16	Dec. 4  <b>Dec. 6 (9 a.m.)</b>	Chapter 13 Presentations  Quiz 5 (Chapters 11-13) <b>**NOTE:</b> This is the University scheduled final exam date for our class, but it will not be a comprehensive final. Nor will it be worth any more than the first four quizzes. It will be a regular individual/ team quiz over the last three chapters. The scheduled exam time actually is 8-10:30. Because we will not need 2½ hours, we will meet at 9 a.m., just a half-hour earlier than our usual time, to ensure that we are finished by 10:30.
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